

across the country will “dump the pump” and ride public transportation as part of the Third Annual Dump the Pump Day. This important cause is sponsored by the American Public Transportation Association, APTA, and more than 100 public transportation systems will take part in “dump the pump” activities across the United States to encourage increased ridership on our Nation’s transit systems.

Activities for Dump the Pump day include having public events with drawings for free transit passes and other prizes, offering free or reduced rides, doing radio promotions, and providing “transit ambassadors” to help new riders.

As the price of gas has now surpassed \$4 a gallon, even more commuters are choosing to ride the train or the bus to work rather than drive alone in their cars. In the first quarter of 2008 commuters took more than 2.6 billion trips on trains, subways, light rail, and buses nationwide, an increase of 3.3 percent over the first quarter of 2007. Light rails saw the largest jump in ridership with a 10 percent increase to 110 million trips. Transit systems in metropolitan areas are reporting increases in ridership of 5, 10, and even 15 percent over last year’s figures. Some of the biggest increases in ridership are occurring in many areas in the South and West where new bus and light rail lines have been built in the last few years.

Recently, public transportation has experienced a renaissance in American cities and towns. In 2007, Americans took over 10.3 billion trips on public transportation, the highest level in 50 years. Public transportation use is up 32 percent since 1995, a figure that is more than double the growth rate of the population and is substantially over the growth rate for the vehicle miles traveled on our Nation’s highways for that same period. All around the country, voters continue to approve State and local ballot initiatives to support public transportation, even when it means local taxes will be raised or continued.

Despite these dramatic increases in usage, only 5 percent of workers nationally commute by public transit. Efforts to increase this statistic, such as Dump the Pump Day, are critical to assisting American commuters in making the switch to public transit in their daily commutes.

Another important goal of Dump the Pump Day is to reduce the United States dependence on foreign oil by encouraging more people to use public transportation. According to a recent study, if Americans used public transit at the same rate as Europeans—for roughly 10 percent of their daily travel needs—the United States could reduce its dependence on imported oil by more than 40 percent, nearly equal to the 550 million barrels of crude oil that we import from Saudi Arabia each year. When a solo commuter switches from a single occupancy vehicle to a transit commute, this single mode shift can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 pounds per day—more than 4,800 pounds in a year.

Public transportation use in all of its forms—bus, rail, vanpool, ferry, streetcar, and subway ridership to name a few—saves fuel, reduces emissions, and saves money. The direct petroleum savings attributable to current public transportation use in the United States is 1.4 billion gallons per year. When the secondary effects of transit availability on travel are also taken into account, the equivalent of 4.2 billion

gallons of gasoline is saved annually—more than 11 million gallons of gasoline per day.

This is why I have introduced H.R. 6052, the “Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008.” This bill provides much needed support to public transportation agencies and greater incentives for commuters to choose transit options, thereby reducing their transportation-related energy consumption and reliance on foreign oil. The Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008 authorizes funding for transit agencies nationwide that are temporarily reducing transit fares or expanding transit services to meet the needs of the growing number of transit commuters. H.R. 6052 also extends the Federal transit pass benefits program to require all Federal agencies in the United States to offer transit passes to Federal employees working in urbanized areas with fixed route transit systems nationwide.

Both increased use of public transportation and increased Federal investment in transit are crucial steps we must take to address skyrocketing gas prices, environmental degradation and gridlocked roadways across the Nation.

For these reasons and more, I support the Third Annual Dump the Pump Day to promote public transportation usage in the United States and help America break its addiction to foreign oil, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and free our highways from the crippling effects of congestion. I also urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 6052, the Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008.

ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS HOME RULE ACT OF 2008

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, today, I am introducing the Public Charter Schools Home Rule Act of 2008, to give the District of Columbia local government full jurisdiction and complete oversight over the District of Columbia Charter School Board. I had hoped this normally routine local control would be possible when I was in the minority and worked with House Speaker Newt Gingrich and former Representative Steve Gunderson on the bill that created the District’s major charter school board. While the charter board bill itself was created on a home rule basis, the structure was not, and reflects a period before the recovery of the DC government from financial and managerial distress.

The DC Charter School Board is composed of members selected by the mayor, but only from a list of individuals presented by the Secretary of the Department of Education. Unlike similar boards in the District, the charter school board members need not be residents of the District of Columbia. Because the mayor is not permitted to select members of the board other than those submitted by the Secretary, the Federal Government inserts itself into critical decisionmaking about an important local education matter. This is an anti-home rule anomaly in a bill which had strong home rule support and is justifiably resented by DC public officials and residents.

Ironically, the charter school bill itself was drawn with an abundance of home rule officials and resident participation. The DC Charter School Board was established by Congress during a time when the District was in the midst of a serious financial crisis. The city’s local charter board, working under the DC Board of Education, had largely failed in its mandate to charter schools. Yet, it was clear that the District’s children needed an alternative to the local school system. I am grateful that my Republican congressional colleagues, who controlled Congress at the time, agreed that alternatives to DCPS could be created without going to private school vouchers, which DC residents and elected officials strongly opposed. Instead, a task force, created by Speaker Gingrich and led by former Representative Steve Gunderson, worked with officials, residents and me, on a home rule basis, to develop the bill. The task force held many sessions that members of the City Council, the School Board, DC education advocates, and residents who had a special interest in education attended. H.R. 3610 became the first Federal charter school bill. Shortly thereafter, a nationwide charter school bill that includes grant funding was enacted with broad bipartisan support.

I do not believe any of us could have anticipated the phenomenal growth and success of the DC Charter School Board or the level of innovations, diversity and excellence of many of the schools that has made it a model, and my bill is not intended as a criticism of the Charter School Board or its work. DC residents have created huge demand. The exponential growth of charter schools up to the largest number in the U.S. and their long waiting lists are a solid indication of the success of our charter schools in meeting the needs of thousands of students. The city would almost surely have lost many more residents than it has without the large growth of charters schools.

Mayor Adrian Fenty is restructuring and reforming the DC public school system and has dissolved the local charter school board, leaving the federally created charter school board as the only standing authority. However, a federally chartered board structure is at odds with these reforms. Only a structure developed by local, officials is appropriate, particularly for local education matters. This bill, therefore, does not create a structure or indicate the appointing authority. In our country that is a matter for local officials alone. I have insisted that this bill do no more than repeal all existing Federal jurisdiction and transfer that jurisdiction to the District of Columbia to write its own bill.

Only DC officials should appoint members to its local education board. The board cannot be appropriately accountable if its members are chosen from outside the accountable jurisdiction. I urge my colleagues to pass this important measure as soon as possible.

OFFERING GOOD LUCK AND A
SAFE RETURN TO GROTON’S
1109TH AVCRAD

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Mr. COURTNEY. Madam Speaker, today, nearly 150 members of the 1109th Aviation